

2. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

This plan is a guidance tool specific to released and wild-hatched cranes for use by those individuals and groups charged with maintaining habitat quality, assessing state population goals, monitoring and managing crane activities, addressing landowner needs, developing ecotourism opportunities, and educating the public. In this plan, management strategies and protocol recommendations have been developed to maintain a high level of protection and ensure future success of whooping cranes in Wisconsin, while considering the needs and interests of state citizens and communities.

For at least five more years, approximately 20 - 30 whooping crane chicks will be added annually to the Wisconsin wild release conditioning programs. Chicks are supplied through captive breeding programs at the USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Maryland and the ICF in Wisconsin. The number of chicks available for the reintroduction program is limited by small facility capacity, staff funding, and weather-related events. Hopefully, as the population matures, additional chicks will result from successful wild nesting in Wisconsin's wetlands.

At five-year intervals (2011, 2016, etc.) a review of the whooping crane's population status and this plan should occur to identify opportunities, concerns, and support of whooping crane management. The body of this document may then be revised; the appendices may be more frequently revised and dated as needed. **To assure the sustainability of the population, the target 2020 interim goal is a MINIMUM population of 100 whooping cranes with 25 breeding pairs that regularly nest and fledge offspring, in conjunction with the same target numbers for an introduced Florida non-migratory population. If the Florida reintroduction effort is unsuccessful, the eastern migratory population minimum target becomes 120 whooping cranes with 30 breeding pairs that regularly nest and fledge offspring by 2020** (CWS & USFWS, 2006).

By contributing to and applying information in this plan, WI DNR partners with WCEP and the IWCRT to evaluate the reintroduction program, and determine the level of success in restoration of this species to Wisconsin and eastern North America. Accordingly, the WI DNR Whooping Crane Coordinator confers monthly with other WCEP Project Direction Team members. At the same time, Wisconsin DNR staff work with state citizens and federal and nongovernmental agencies to assess and manage habitat critical to the establishment and survival of a healthy population.

Adoption of this plan occurs as WCEP partners embark on the sixth successful year of whooping crane reintroductions. By autumn 2006, an eastern population of more than 85 whooping cranes is expected to migrate between Wisconsin and the southern U.S.